

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Luke 11:1-11

Introduction

In our Gospel reading today Jesus is teaching about prayer. The disciples saw him at prayer and wanted to know how to pray themselves. Jesus responded in two ways.

He taught them how to pray

Then he taught them how to pray.

No I'm not confused

He gave them the ingredients of prayer

Then he taught them the attitude in which they should be praying

What would you consider to be the perfect prayer?

What would make it perfect?

How would it be prayed?

Definition

Prayer 'is an invocation or act that seeks to activate a rapport with a deity, an object of worship, or a spiritual entity through deliberate communication' which reminds me of the communist definition of a kiss that bears no relationship to the experienced reality. A kiss is the meeting of two pairs of lips with a reciprocal exchange of bacteria!

Show sheep, show pattern.

Explain that the instructions enable me to recreate the sheep exactly each time – but they are all different because of the choice of colours and type of wool I used

In this passage Jesus is giving his followers a pattern for prayer: The ingredients that should be in our conversations with God. The form of words actually unpacks to provide a theology of our relationship with God. They show us who the God we are praying to is and what his concerns and attitudes to us are. They should form the framework of our prayers.

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Luke 11:1-11

We use this framework as a prayer in itself because it covers everything we need to say but often we don't really think about the meaning or importance of what we are asking God for when we pray it.

Father, hallowed be thy name.

Thy Kingdom come.

Give us this day our daily bread:

And forgive us our debts (sins) as we forgive everyone who is indebted to us (who sins against us)

And lead us not into temptation

Father

Any Jew could have prayed, "our Father, who art in heaven" using the formal and exclusively religious word 'Abinu'. But when Jesus prayed he used the word 'Abba' which is the word a child used to speak to his human father. In changing the way we speak to God what Jesus has done is to transform the Fatherhood of God from a theological doctrine, a concept about our relationship to God and his care for us, into an intense and intimate experience.

He is telling us that when we are speaking to God we are not simply underlining a family connection we are coming as love children to a loving father. I guess it is a bit like the relationships we see in our Royal Family. When speaking of him in public Prince William calls Prince Charles, "my father" but in private he calls him daddy, or did when he was a child. I once saw an interview of them both where that formal cover slipped and we could see the intimate relationship that lay behind the formal connection. The Lord's Prayer encourages us to pray with that Family intimacy. We have the right to come to our God, creator of heaven and earth and call him daddy. It is that closeness that God not only offers to us but expects to have with us.

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Luke 11:1-11

Hallowed be thy name

The Lord's Prayer covers all that a child needs to say to their Father. Before they come to their own personal needs they share the Father's larger concerns and plans.

God's name is his whole nature and purpose and it is hallowed, made holy, when that nature and purpose are known and held in reverence. This first petition is primarily a prayer that God will act to display his holiness and love.

Ezekiel 36:23

*²³ I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, **when I am proved holy through you before their eyes.***

But since God's acts require human agents and a human response it is also a dedication – a statement of intent: that we will allow God's holiness to be seen through us and our actions.

Thy kingdom come

The second request is also a double one because God's Kingdom is his rule of righteousness and love and it is established by his free unconditional grace, but it is also a demand for men's faith and obedience because God's kingdom reigns where people seek him and obey him. If we are asking God to establish his rule here on earth we are actually asking him to start with us – so it a prayer of commitment as well.

Give us this day our daily bread

Sometimes, as Christians, we feel that it is not right or very Christian to ask God for things for ourselves. We feel it is much more holy to ask for things for other people and some of us find it very difficult indeed to pray for our own needs. But Jesus is teaching us here that we can confidently ask God for what we need and in fact he encourages us to. God has created the world and all that is in it and he delights in providing for his people. When the Israelites journeyed through the desert God gave them, every day, sufficient

1 Corinthians 10:1-13**Luke 11:1-11**

food to nourish and sustain them. The interesting thing about Manna was that however little or much the Israelites gathered it was exactly right for what they needed that day and when they gathered more than they needed and tried to stockpile it, it went mouldy. God knows what we need for each and every day and he wants us to have that dependence on him that comes to him every day for what we need. It is not wrong to ask for material things – we are material beings and we have needs and our heavenly father delights to provide for us. What we do need to do though is to distinguish between ‘needs’ and ‘wants’.

Thirty years ago when I began my theological training I badly needed a car to get me from London to the college in Durham and get me around when there. I prayed for a car. God gave me a Ford Cortina – not a Porsche!

Forgive us as we forgive others

When Jesus taught his followers this prayer he knew his mission on earth was to secure forgiveness for our sins. Forgiveness is at the heart of God’s attitude to us. He is disgusted by our sin yet distressed by the distance that sin puts between him and us. His main mission is to deal with those sins and failure in our lives that separate us from him and restore relationship. He encourages us to keep a short account. To regularly come before him acknowledging our wrongdoing and asking his forgiveness, unless by our resentment against others we have closed our hearts to his mercy

Lead us not into temptation

God knows that we are human and as such are weak. So Jesus encourages us to ask for God’s protection to keep us from any trial that would prove too much for our strength of character. This is probably one of the clauses of this pattern that we skip over most quickly but it is important because the truth is that life is a battle and when we forget that and rely on our own strength we are at our most vulnerable. God has infinite resources to provide and care for us – he simply asks us to know and understand our weaknesses so we can come to him for protection and help when needed.

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Luke 11:1-11

So this is **how** Jesus **teaches us to pray**. He then goes on to teach us **how** we should pray

The parable of the friend at midnight encourages his listeners to present their prayers as an insistent pressing demand, not to give up but to bring our requests to God as a matter of urgency and not be discouraged when we, at first, receive no answer. In this story the sort of house Jesus has in mind would have sleeping quarters all in one room. The father would be asleep on a mat on the floor surrounded by his children and his wife. To get up would disturb the whole family which explains the reluctance of the householder to answer his friend's request.

But his friend is in urgent need. It is hard for us to understand that living in our society and culture but in the Middle East in Jesus' time hospitality was a matter of honour. When a traveller requested food and shelter from someone they had a solemn obligation to provide for him. No less a reason would justify disturbing someone once the door was shut. His insistent knocking not only got the man the loaves he needed but showed how much store he set by getting them. God does not need to be wakened or cajoled into giving us what we need but he wants us to value what he gives us and to ask until our requests are granted. Jesus is encouraging a kind of holy boldness, a sharp knocking on the door, an insistent asking, a search that refuses to give up.

That's what our prayer should be like. This isn't just a routine or formal praying, going through the motions as a daily or weekly task. There is a battle on, a fight with the powers of darkness and those who have seen God's light are called to struggle in prayer – for peace, for reconciliation, for wisdom, for a thousand things for the world and the church – God calls his followers to be intercessors, people through whose prayers God's love is poured out on the world. But because these things we are called to pray for are urgent, important and complex there needs to be more to prayer than simple regularity and covering the subject matter. Regular liturgical prayer is important to us but it is like the metal shell of a car, in order to function the car needs fuel for its engine and to be effective prayer needs energy too in this case the kind of dogged

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Luke 11:1-11

determination it takes to wake a friend from sleep and get from them what is needed.